Drama

Hugh Kelly.

THESPIS:

OR, A

CRITICAL EXAMINATION

INTO THE

MERITS of all the Principal PERFORMERS

BELONGING TO

DRURY-LANE THEATRE.

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THESPIS.

BOLD is his taſk in this diſcerning age,
When every witling prates about the ſtage;
And ſome pert title arrogantly brings
To trace up nature thro' her nobleſt ſprings:
Bold in ſuch times, his taſk muſt be allow'd
Who ſeeks to form a judgment for the croud;
Preſumes, the public ſentiment to guide,
And ſpeaks at once to prejudice and pride.
Of all the ſtudies in theſe happier days,
By which we ſoar, ambitiouſly to praiſe.

Of all the fine performances of art,
Which charm the eye, or captivate the heart;
None like the ſtage our admiration draws;
Or gains ~~ſo~~ *ſuch* high, and ~~proper, an~~ *merritted* applauſe.
Yet, has this art unhappily no rules
To check the vain impertinence of fools,
To point out rude deformity from grace,
And ſtrike a line 'twixt acting and grimace.

HIGH as the town, with reverence we may name,
And ſtamp its general ſentiments to fame;
Loud, as, perhaps, we eccho to its voice,
And pay a boundleſs homage to its choice;
Still, if we look, minutely, we ſhall find
Each ſingle judge ſo impotent or blind,
That ev'n the actor whom we moſt admire,
For eaſe or humour, dignity or fire,
Shall often bluſh to meet the ill-earn'd bays,
And pine beneath an infamy of praiſe.

HOW oft, ſoul-ſearching GARRICK, have I hung
On every accent of that wond'rous tongue;

When

When in Old LEAR, returning into ſenſe,
And faintly gueſſing at ſome paſt offence,
To gain CORDELIA's pardon thou haſt pray'd,
And knelt by inſtinct with that ſuffering maid!
How has my breaſt then labour'd with its ſigh,
And the big ſorrow delug'd all my eye;
While keen delight perform'd a traytor's part,
And ach'd intenſely round my ſtruggling heart!
Yet, in thoſe moments, when I ſought to find
An equal tranſport in the public mind;
When I believ'd a ſympathy wou'd ſhine
In every eye as honeſtly as mine;
A lifeleſs pauſe, perhaps, has gloom'd along,
And drowſy dulneſs ſat upon the throng;
Enormous curls have ſlept on empty blocks,
Or well-bred curtſies ſhot from box to box;
Whereas, when priſoner, and in fetters bound,
A peal of praiſe has thunder'd all around,
And every hand employ'd its utmoſt pains,
To clap the mighty merit ~~of the chains~~ of the Chains.

WHEN things, like theſe, for ever give offence,
And empty ſhew is lifted over ſenſe: When

When men throw nature negligently by,
And judge not from the feelings, but the eye;
Nay, when our actors, in their buſieſt parts,
While fear or hope ſtand beating at our hearts,
From the warm ſcene may ſcandalouſly run,
To feaſt the galleries with an inſtant pun;
Then, keen-ey'd ſatire, conſciouſly ſhou'd riſe,
And hold a mirror to the public eyes;
Alike regardleſs of her foe or friend,
With candour blame, with honeſty commend;
Applaud, if right, the man ſhe may deteſt,
And ſtrike, if wrong, the brother of her breaſt.

'Tis on the ſtage, as 'tis in life, we find
No ſingle man quite excellent in mind;
Nor do we meet a boſom ſo deprav'd,
So loſt in vice, and utterly enſlav'd,
But what, at times, ſome tranſient ſpark of grace
Has beam'd his eye, and flaſh'd upon his face;
With pitying warmth intuitively ſtole,
And pierc'd the Stygian ſable of his ſoul.

Therefore,

Therefore, unlike ſome brothers of the pen,
Who judg'd of actors as they judg'd of men,
In wild extremes ridiculouſly trod,
And drew, by turns, a dæmon or a god;
My tints from life ſhall regularly glow,
And paint both faults and beauties as they grow;
Convinc'd, the trueſt pictures muſt be made,
Where light is blended properly with ſhade.

LONG in the annals of theatric fame,
Has truth grac'd GARRICK with a foremoſt name;
Long in a wide diverſity of parts,
Allow'd his double empire o'er our hearts;
Either in mirth to laugh us to exceſs,
Or, where he weeps, to load us with diſtreſs---
Nor is it ſtrange, that e'en in partial days,
He gains ſo high an eminence of praiſe;
When his united requiſites are more,
Than ever centred in one mind before:
Say, if we ſearch, minutely, from the age
In which old THESPIS firſt began the ſtage,

And range thro' all the celebrated climes,
In which it flouriſh'd, to the preſent times,
Where ſhall we find an actor who has preſt,
With ſuch extenſive force upon the breaſt,
Fill'd ſuch oppoſing characters for years,
Unmatch'd, alike, in laughter or in tears?
Others, perhaps, the greateſt of their hour,
Whom fame extoll'd as prodigies of power,
Have yet to ſcanty limits been confin'd,
And ſhewn but one dull tendency of mind;
On bold blank-verſe heroically roſe,
Or meanly ambled upon humbler proſe---
OTHELLO's form a BETTERTON might wear,
And rend the ſoul with horror and deſpair;
BOOTH might with conſcious majeſty declaim,
And build on CATO a ſubſtantial name;
In WILDAIR, WILKES moſt certainly might ſoar,
And CIBBER's fop ſet millions in a roar;
But which of theſe like GARRICK cou'd appear,
In ROMEO, SHARPE, in DRUGGER and in LEAR;
Fill the wide rounds of paſſion as they fall,
And ſhine with equal excellence in all?

Yet,

YET, tho' thus warm I freely pour my thoughts,
I ſtill muſt think that GARRICK has his faults;
Some caſual errors in his parts, which run
As ſpecks ſometimes will faſten on the ſun;
Ev'n in his LEAR, where deſperately wild,
He ſtabs the ruffians to preſerve his child,
And quite worn out with tenderneſs and rage,
Leans, wholly ſpent, and breathleſs on the ſtage;
Then, while the tide of ſympathy has roſe,
And every boſom labour'd with his woes,
Then have I ſeen him negligently fall,
Full with his face againſt the priſon wall,
Snatch every feature ſtrangely from our ſight,
And check the flood of exquiſite delight.

THO' fam'd APELLES, at a touch cou'd give,
The warming canvaſs almoſt how to live;
Tho' ſcarce to leſs than deity, when grown,
He call'd out new creations of his own;
Yet, when the weakneſs of his art he ſaw,
The Grecian father's agony to draw,
'Twas wiſe, a veil upon his face to throw,
Whoſe pangs he found impoſſible to ſhew;

But when, even Shakeſpear never cou'd poſſeſs
Too big a grief for GARRICK to expreſs,
When his ſharp eye ſo piercingly can roll,
And dart ſuch inſtant paſſions thro' the ſoul,
'Tis doubly wrong, the tenderer the caſe,
To hide the wond'rous workings of his face;
To check our hopes, or play upon our fears,
And damp the rich-ſoul'd luxury of tears.

FOR five long years in dark oblivion thrown,
Has LEE remain'd, neglected and unknown,
Unleſs, when chance, on ſome capricious ſtart,
Has kindly bleſt him with a decent part;
Yet was this LEE, at one auſpicious hour,
Allow'd to boaſt a little ſhare of power,
Was thought in various characters to pleaſe,
And fam'd no leſs for energy than eaſe,
For me, who feel a tenderneſs of breaſt,
Where'er a dawn of merit ſeems oppreſt,
I may, perhaps, be partial to his faults,
And do him more than juſtice in my thoughts;
But when I ſee the genuine paſſions riſe,
Which flame in ABOAN's red reſenting eyes;

When I behold in VERNISH's diſgrace
The ſtruggling ſoul ſo ſtampt upon the face;
Or meet in BELMONT with that dangerous art,
Which even for crimes can plead about the heart;
I own, it wounds my temper and my taſte
To find him ſtill ſo deſpicably plac'd;
Sent on in FRENCHMEN, RALEIGHS, and GLENDOWERS,
While things like PACKER ſurfeit us for hours.
'Tis true that LEE has fatally imbib'd
A mode of ſpeech not eaſily deſcrib'd;
A nice affected drawlingneſs of phraſe,
A wire-drawn tone in every thing he plays;
With which, too oft, moſt execrably fine,
He racks a word, and tortures out a line;
Yet ſtill has LEE a conſequence of form,
A voice and look ſo capable to warm
A ſtage ſtruck heat, ſo vehemently ſtrong,
With ſuch a piercing conſciouſneſs of wrong,
That even when BARRY, in his nobleſt courſe,
Some few weeks ſince exerted all his force;
Strain'd every nerve to draw the ſcattering crown,
And cramm'd ~~his~~ the moon-ey'd idiot on the town;

Then did this LEE burſt on us in a blaze,
And wake us all to wonder and to praiſe;
Give vile IAGO's deeply ſcheming ire
The boldeſt touches of dramatic fire,
And ſwell the gen'rous PIERRE with a flame
That left even JAFFIER but a ſecond fame.
Hence, mean ſoe'er, as managers may prize,
I look on LEE with very different eyes,
And freely place, however they diſdain,
His chair next GARRICK's high in Drury-Lane.

THE greateſt charge our little judges lay
When HOLLAND's worth they critically weigh,
Is, that in all the characters he tries,
His maſter GARRICK ever fills his eyes;
That meanly ſervile in his walk of parts,
He ſtrives to ſhine by imitative arts,
And now, ſo dull a copieſt is grown,
To want all ſenſe and feeling of his own.
In this nice age, when fatally diſgrac'd,
Poor ſenſe falls martyr'd at the ſhrine of taſte,
When a mere word, indefinite and vain,
The random coinage of the coxcomb's brain,

By truth and judgment wholly unconfin'd,
And differing ſtill in ev'ry different mind,
Uſurps the air of ſentiment, to paſs
For ſterling gold her deſpicable braſs;
Then imitation certainly muſt fall,
And raiſe the general enmity of all;
Muſt own the pride-taught ſentence to be juſt,
And lick the foot that tramples it in duſt.
Yet, ſure, if GARRICK hitherto has ran
By reaſon's line, and juſtly laid his plan
On that exalted principle of art,
Which knocks with truth's bold hand againſt the heart;
If in the various characters he plays
The genuine form of nature he conveys,
And hits, in ſhort, upon that happy right,
Which gives the fineſt eſſence of delight,
Thoſe who affect to turn away the head
When HOLLAND ſeeks his veſtiges to tread,
Muſt argue leſs from judgment than from whim,
Since copying nature is to copy him.
But, why at all ſhould critics proudly ſtart,
And ſeem to frown on imitative art?

Where

Where worth, or fame our admiration raiſe,
A wiſh to copy is a kind of praiſe—
Say in this age, ſome genius ſhou'd we find
So rich in thought, and vigorous in mind,
As gave the fury of a ſtage deſire,
Even the pale glimm'ring of a SHAKESPEAR's fire,
Should we not all inevitably throng
To hail the glowing wonders of his ſong,
And with a wild munificence reward
The faineſt traces of our deathleſs bard?
For me, unapt to criticiſe in haſte,
And little guilty of a modern taſte;
I own this HOLLAND ever my offence,
But where he draws from GARRICK, and from ſenſe;
While he does this, I patiently attend,
And often find no little to commend,
With honeſt warmth his plaudit I can hear,
And join myſelf the tribute of a tear.
But when ſome air-born fancy to purſue,
He lets his maſter once eſcape his view;
When much too great for imitation grown,
He boldly ſeeks a manner of his own,

Sententious,

Sententious, dull, and heavy he appears,
His words like weights hang dragging on our ears;
Fatigues to death in ſpite of all our power,
And drawl the minute's ſentence to an hour---
Nor is this all, a ſtupid ſort of ſtare,
A ſtarch'd, ſtiff, ſtalking, aukwardneſs of air,
Abſorb at once his figure and his face,
And ſcorn all marks of nature and of grace;
While the purs'd lips, to wind up ev'ry pauſe,
Important ſwell and bully for applauſe.

Few for ſo ſhort an interval have gain'd
A higher rank than Powell has obtain'd;
And few, in fact, at preſent on the ſtage,
Deſerve a warmer notice from the age.
Form'd with ſome lines that happily expreſs
No little ſenſe of pity and diſtreſs;
And form'd with tones that frequently impart
No little ſhare of ſoftneſs to the heart,
On many minds he tenderly can ſteal,
And teach a drowſy auditor to feel.

Hence, in thoſe parts where wretchedneſs and years
Alarm alike our pity and our fears,
Where the poor LUSIGNAN, from priſon led,
Shakes the white honours of his ſacred head:
O'er his ſweet Pagan tenderly complains,
And calls again for darkneſs, and for chains;
Or, where old HENRY, ſick'ning with deſpair,
Upbraids the wildneſs of his madcap heir;
In parts like theſe, to POWELL I attend
A ſtrong admirer, and a ſteady friend.---
But, when in gay LOTHARIO he wou'd ſhew,
The ſprightly airs of libertine and beau;
Or give in TOWNLY, to a modiſh wife,
The nicer touches of ſuperior life;
Not all the ſcrapes, or cringes which he tries,
Thoſe paltry arts of little men to riſe;
The ſcorn of ſenſe and judgment can remove,
Or teach one honeſt blockhead to approve.

As yet, two raw young ſtriplings on the ſtage,
Unfit for fight, tho' burning to engage,

Led

Led on by hope, courageouſly to preſs,
Yet taught by ſenſe, to practiſe for ſucceſs;
No judgment, now, of CAUTHERLY I frame;
Nor ſettle BENSLY's title to a name.---
Where firſt eſſays are diffidently tried,
A candid mind muſt cautiouſly decide;
Nor raſhly riſque opinions, which in time
The muſe herſelf may cenſure as a crime.

WHERE the gay muſe in laughter loves to ſport,
And briſk THALIA holds her hum'rous court,
YATES with high rank, for ever muſt be plac'd,
Who blends ſuch ſtrict propriety with taſte;
From nature's fount ſo regularly draws,
And never ſeeks to trick us of applauſe.
Mark, when he plays, no vacancy of face,
No wand'ring eye, or ignorant grimace,
Is rudely ſuffer'd once to intervene,
Or check the growing buſineſs of a ſcene;
Nay, in his ſilence, happily employ'd,
He looks continual meaning on the void;
Bids every glance with character be fraught,
And ſwells each muſcle with a burſt of thought.

Hence, in thoſe cruder ſections of a part,
Where want of humour muſt be fill'd by art,
Where the poor poet, in ſome luckleſs fit
Miſtakes a dull prolixity for wit;
His merit ſhines with undiminiſh'd rays,
And lifts whole troops of RESTLESS's to praiſe.---
Yet there are times, when ſpite of all his care,
Our taſte muſt briſtle, and our ſenſe muſt ſtare:
When a new part unhappily he plays,
A thouſand doubts perplex him, and amaze;
Faſt from himſelf he tremblingly retires,
Nor truſts that worth which all the world admires;
But on a ſea of cauſeleſs terror toſt,
Allows both mind and memory to be loſt.

BUT tho' on YATES the comic muſe may ſhower
An ample fund of humour and of power;
Tho' in his walk of characters he claims
So high a place among theatric names,
Still there are others in her ſmiles who ſhare,
And prove her generous as they know her fair.
Oft in ſome whim, the buxom nymph will try
To paſs for KING upon the public eye:

On TOM or RANGER, wantonly will ſeize,
And give us all his ſpirit and his eaſe:
Again, in PRATTLE phyſically prim,
She ſteals each look and attitude from him;
And like a virgin, whoſe unpractis'd breaſt
Some blooming youth entirely has poſſeſs'd;
Who, if miſchance unhappily ſhould ſtart,
To wound the face that captivates her heart,
Feels no unkind propenſity to rove,
But throbs all pitying with a ſofter love;
So, when emaciate with diſeaſe and years,
Her fav'rite KING in OGLEBY appears,
The comic muſe exerts unuſual force
To call down laughter from its richeſt ſource;
Glows with a flame additionally warm,
And ſeems in more than raptures with his form---
O! that the goddeſs, in ſome lucky hour
Wou'd wiſely try the utmoſt of her power,
Wou'd tell her KING, that in the well-bred ſmart,
Too great a pertneſs quite deſtroys the part;
And, when a BASSET's habit he wou'd wear,
Diſmiſs the ſaucy SMATTER from his air.

VERNON to favour ne'er can have pretence,
A ſinger truly,---and diſgac'd with ſenſe.
Why ſhould a fellow bleſt with ſuch a ſtrain,
As ſtill can charm us to the verge of pain,
The melting ſoul in extaſy abſorb,
And almoſt pluck a planet from its orb;
Why ſhould he ſtrive in ſuch a ſing-ſong age,
To ſoar by ſterling merit on the ſtage,
Or ſeek by knowledge in dramatic laws,
To reach a vulgar MASCULINE applauſe?
Did he indeed, ne'er generouſly riſe
Beyond the TOM TALE, or the LONDON CRIES,
With which of late, ſo dead to every ſhame,
He meanly pimp'd for proſtituted fame,
Some room for eaſy pardon might be found,
And dullneſs join moſt lovingly with ſound;
But, when PHARNACES, or MACHEATH we ſee
So nerv'd with thought, ſo ſpirited and free,
When ev'n his flimſieſt characters of ſong
Can ſtrike our minds ſo wonderfully ſtrong,
Our honeſt rage eternally muſt live,
And prudence make it madneſs to forgive.

PALMER,

PALMER, from playing almoſt every night,
Has grown ſo long familiar to our ſight,
That even in ſcenes ſcarce poſſible to bear,
We kindly rate him as a decent player.
Yet, ſince the ſtage its firſt exiſtence drew,
An odder compound never ſtruck our view;
Nor did the drama ever yet produce
So bad an actor half ſo fit for uſe.
Mark with what grace his perſon is deſign'd
For parts of life, and characters refin'd;
Yet, that ſtrange ſhambling of deportment ſee,
Tho' eaſy, ſtiff; and manacled, tho' free;
Tho' ſtrait, yet doubled; tortur'd, tho' in form;
Aukward, tho' bred; and ſpiritleſs tho' warm---
Tho' fraught with tones articulate and clear,
He keeps an endleſs ſcreaming on the ear;
Howls out young OAKLEY in ſuch hideous ſtrains,
As midnight wolves might uſe upon the plains,
And ſtrangles poor Sir BRILLIANT in a note
Too nicely horrid for a human throat.
But, tho' in wide and capital reſpects,
I ſee in PALMER manifeſt defects;

Tho'

Tho' that addreſs ſo terrible muſt ſeem,
And that vile voice excruciate with its ſcream;
Yet, ever ready in the heavieſt parts,
He ſcorns all aid from deſpicable arts,
And ever maſter of his author's aim,
Juſt to his ſenſe, and cautious of his fame,
With ſecret pleaſure I behold him riſe,
And cry, "Peace," always to my ears and eyes---

If ſtrong good ſenſe, and latitude of mind,
A keen conception, and a taſte refin'd,
A long acquaintance with thoſe nicer arts
That read thro' life, and ſtudy thro' our hearts,
An actor's name with certainty might raiſe,
Or bind his temples with the generous bays,
Who againſt Love a ſyllable cou'd breathe,
Or once diſpute his title to a wreathe?
But, 'tis not taſte or judgment which can give
An actor's name eternally to live;
Or even the wideſt knowledge of mankind,
Which ſtamps, thro' time, his image on the mind---
Hence, tho' in Falstaff, Love has oft expreſt,
A nice obſervance of the human breaſt;

Tho' in his BAYS we readily admire
The critic's clearneſs and the actor's fire,
Yet, when we ſee him on GRANADA's throne,
The dupe of ZARA's fury and his own;
Or mark in GLOSTER, with what nerveleſs rage
He drives poor SHORE to wander from the ſtage,
We all lament the cruelty of fate,
Which damns ſo good an actor into ſtate,
And find theſe ſceptres quite as dangerous things,
To mimic monarchs as to actual kings---

IN foreign footmen, BADDELY alone
Preſerves the native naſilneſs of tone,
And in his manner ſtrongly ſhews ally'd
Their genuine turn of abjectneſs and pride.
If proofs are wanting, on CANTON I call,
And aſk the general ſentiments of all---
Here then, ſecure of competence and name,
He ought to reſt his fortune and his fame,
And not in buckiſh epilogues, which ſpring
With real life from nobody but KING;

At random riſque, the favour which we ſhower
On ſcenes more ſuited to his taſte and power---.

Blest with the happieſt nothingneſs of form,
Which nature e'er with being ſtrove to warm,
On life's juſt ſcale ſcarce capable to ſtand,
A kind of mandrake in creation's hand;
See Dodd, in all his tininess of ſtate
Reſiſt his ſtars, and counteract his fate,
On actual wants prepoſterouſly ſhine,
Abſurdly great, and deſpicably fine---
Fram'd at his birth a coxcomb for the ſtage,
He ſoars the foremoſt fribble of the age,
And ſtruck by chance on ſome egregious plan,
A mere nice prim, epitome of man,
In every coinage of the poet's brain,
Who blends alike the worthleſs and the vain,
Who in ſuch parts as Faddle, has deſign'd
A fopling's figure for a villain's mind;
There Dodd's fine want of all exterior weight,
New points our laugh, or doubly whets our hate,

Hangs

Hangs the vile ſlave more openly in morn,
And brands him ſtill with aggravated ſcorn---
But when at WILDAIR's elegance he tries,
Or ſeeks in well-bred NOVELTY to riſe;
When on thoſe parts he fatally will ſtrike,
Which urge no ſcorn, and furniſh no diſlike,
There all his ~~price~~ *nice* inanity miſplac'd,
Diſguſts alike our judgment and our taſte:
There he provokes our ridicule, or rage,
And melts poor WILDAIR down into a page---

'TIS true, in life we frequently behold
A daring ſpirit in the ſmalleſt mould,
And ne'er from face or perſon think to find
The latent turn of principle or mind:
But in the drama, with creative fire,
We give each part the perſon we deſire,
Expect all grace in BEVIL's ſhou'd be ſeen,
But aſk for SNEAK's diminutive and mean---
Hence, if deceiv'd, that faſcinating rage
Which nerves the ſcene, and vivifies the ſtage,
Calls out illuſion thro' the roar of ſtrife,
And warms the moral fiction into life;

That inſtant, flags no more to be poſſeſs'd,
And ſpreads one torpid dullneſs thro' the breaſt---

Born to delight a laughter-loving age,
And give freſh ſunds of humour to the ſtage;
Mark with what ſtrength of unaffected eaſe,
That happy Weston commonly can pleaſe:
Tho' bold, yet ſimple; forcible, tho' cool;
Fine without trick; and finiſh'd without rule---
In thoſe ſtill ſcenes of *ſcarce exiſting* life,
Where Sneak breathes only to obey a wife;
Or where poor Drugger publicly diſplay'd,
Hangs out the mere dull animal of trade;
There Weston's worth with certainty may reſt,
Nor fear the ſtricteſt rigidneſs of teſt;
There a ſublime ſtupidity of face,
As dead to ſenſe as deſtitute of grace,
A fix'd, relaxleſs vacancy of lines,
With ſuch true genius generally ſhines,
That quite ſurpriz'd, tho' ſatisfied we gaze,
And all is mirth, aſtoniſhment, and praiſe.
Of all the walks in which the humorous power
Of comic wit can exerciſe an hour;

Perhaps, that cold inanimated way
In which an actor never ſeems to play;
In which the chiefeſt merit of a part
Exiſts entirely in the want of art;
The ſtrongeſt force of requiſites may claim,
And prove the hardeſt avenue to fame---
To WESTON's praiſe, then generouſly true,
The muſe ſhall raiſe him publicly to view;
A firſt rate actor of the NOKES's kind,
Beſt when leaſt ſhewn, and happieſt when confin'd---
~~But~~ yet, when by ſome fatality miſled,
A rage for praiſe has overſet his head;
When grown quite arch he madly quits his place,
And ſeeks to ſoar by pertneſs and grimace;
When in attempting at ſome paltry joke,
The fine dry dullneſs of his face is broke,
With juſt diſdain I turn my head aſide,
And damn alike his ignorance and pride---

To ſay that HAVARD never has a claim
To ſome ſmall portion of theatric fame;

To ſay quite roundly, that we never ſhed
Some tranſient gleams of favour on his head,
The public knowledge groſly would abuſe,
And fix a laſting ſtigma on the muſe;
Yet, when our eye upon his claim we throw,
And ſee what lifeleſs plaudits we beſtow,
When thro' his round of requiſites we trace,
Think on his voice, his figure, and his face,
And find plain ſenſe, and memory, at moſt
Are all the mighty merits he can boaſt,
We ſteal in pity from our ſtricter plan,
To praiſe his private virtues as a man,
And while the charms of genuine worth engage,
Deteſt the hour he firſt beheld a ſtage.

HURST, with his talents for life's ancient ſcenes,
Muſt riſe in time, if mindful of the means;
But when with years, and with diſeaſes bow'd,
What need of tones extravagantly loud?
LAURENCE may counſel, and expreſs his fears,
Yet ſhew ſome kind attention to our ears;

And

And woe-worn ADAM may exclaim for bread,
Without once ſplitting a ſpectator's head---
He who would ſeize an andience by the heart,
Shou'd always judge the nature of his part;
And in proportion as the ſcene requires,
Suppreſs the latent-working of his fires;
Since too much force propriety deſtroys,
And white-hair'd grief is never mark'd by noiſe;
Should poor old LEAR forget his tott'ring gait
To ape young AMMON's majeſty and ſtate,
Or godlike CATO from his ſeat advance,
To treat the grinning gallery with a dance;
With what a wild amazement would we ſtare,
And check the mad'ning progreſs of the player?
If then, with HURST we mildly wou'd engage,
And aſk the various properties of age,
Wou'd palſied limbs be all he wiſh'd to own,
Or wou'd he give it feebleneſs of tone?

BUT mark with what vulgarity of ſtare,
What low unmeaning impudence of air
That mud-ey'd MOODY, whoſe relentleſs face,
No bluſh e'er crimſon'd with a moment's grace,

Gapes round the houſe, regardleſs of his part,
All braſs in front, and marble all in heart;
For him no ſcene, however it may flow
With high-wrought wit, or agonizing woe,
Once on his breaſt can fortunately ſteal,
Or teach that ruthleſs boſom how to feel---
Yet, tho cut off from every juſt pretence
To taſte, to nature, decency and ſenſe,
Tho' no bleſt beam of ſympathy e'er ſtole
To rouze the deep ſtagnation of his ſoul;
Still, while O'CUTTER happily can pleaſe
With brainleſs bravery, and with brutal eaſe;
While every human principle of breaſt,
Falls vily martyr'd to an IRISH jeſt,
There his wide want of ſentiment and ſhame,
So nicely tallies with the poet's aim,
That truth herſelf muſt combat in his cauſe,
And yield the crown of infamous applauſe---

NOT ſo the modeſt ACKMAN ſtrikes our view,
Whoſe parts, tho' neither eminent nor new,
Still from his ſtrict propriety and care,
Muſt here be rank'd a tolerable player.

Where Worth, unlettered, in a downright heart,
Charms from a bold benignity of Heart,
And however lowly, simple, or undrest,
Grows thro' its genuine beauty on the breast,
There **Parsons**, always, our attention draws,
And seldom fails of general applause.
When wild Rhetorick madly firing Rage
Prepares to Rob Her Mistress on the Stage,
Does not Each bosom Exquisitely glow,
When Honest Parsons wards away the blow!
And does not Justice strongly wish to cover
The plain, Blunt Meaning of the generous Lover
Small as the part is, Every Eye can find
A Warm Conviction in of Actors mind;
And print out various Characters of Name
Which he might Rescue from Immediate Shame,

On doubtful orders hesitate to fight,
And rush on noon-day error to be right.

Bransby to greatness never makes pretence,
Yet seldom strikes at decency or sense;

I But

Yet tho' thus Strenuous, Barton, in thy praise
The candid Muse her Sentiment conveys,
Still undebauch'd by Flattery or Bribe,
From Nature Start not Salaby aside;
Nor Spurn thou Short, yet Entertaining Sound,
On which, thy work the principally Stands,
Tho' Idle Hopes ambitiously to Climb
In parts of Grace, or Characters Sublime,
Almost as Soon of Moody would She hear,
In wild Orestes or Exclaiming Lear,
As See thee one Inclinable to Siege
On Polish'd Casts of Elegance or Ease,
And think as Soon of Lady Created Dodd,
For High Sould Brutus, or an Actual God,
As Find thee madly Surpris'd to Rehearse
A Single Sentence of Heroic Verse ——

That truth herſelf muſt combat in his cauſe,
And yield the crown of infamous applauſe---

Not ſo the modeſt Ackman ſtrikes our view,
Whoſe parts, tho' neither eminent nor new,
Still from his ſtrict propriety and care,
Muſt here be rank'd a tolerable player.

Small as his ~~round of~~ various characters appear,
He ne'er offends, our viſion, or our ear,
But always decent, perfect, and in place,
Fills his ſhort walk with judgment and with grace---
'Tis not a circuit of five hundred lines
Thro' which a hero rants away or whines,
That e'er an actor's merit can decide,
Or ſerve the candid critic for a guide---
The poor plain ſoldier while the battle glows,
Who darts courageous on his gath'ring foes,
With dauntleſs breaſt beholds his danger riſe,
And nobly ſcorns to ſhudder, tho' he dies,
Is, in my thought, a much more worthy name
Than he, who dead to honour and to ſhame,
Howe'er hung round with title or command,
Intrench'd in daſtard diſcipline can ſtand,
On doubtful orders heſitate to fight,
And ruſh on noon-day error to be right.

Bransby to greatneſs never makes pretence,
Yet ſeldom ſtrikes at decency or ſenſe;

But humbly careful, thro' the round he plays,
Avoids all cenſure, if he meets no praiſe---

AICKIN has various requiſites to pleaſe;
A handſome perſon, and an inborn eaſe,
A manly accent, forcible and clear,
A ready memory, and a happy ear---
And, if the poet with prophetic verſe
Thro' fate's dark womb can accurately pierce,
An hour will come, when time's improving hand
Shall teach his taſte and judgment to expand,
And in dramatic annals mark him fair,
Tho' not a great, a ſerviceable player.

BURTON is one of thoſe unnotic'd things,
Who make good lords, or ſecondary kings,
The livelieſt mind to ſtupefaction lull,
So wiſely flat, and rationally dull---
And yet, with all that wond'rous weight of lead,
Which bounteous fate has given him for a head,
He ſtill poſſeſſes ſuch amazing arts
To riſe quite perfect in the heavieſt parts,

That

That all, with me, muſt highly praiſe his pains,
And own his memory, tho' they doubt his brains.

But now, let juſtice doubly arm the muſe,
And tenfold candour conſecrate her views;
For now, her genuine equity of breaſt
Muſt ſtand a keen unmitigating teſt;
And thoſe who think, that friendſhip or offence
Are yet unmingled in the poet's ſenſe,
May fear, when female characters he draws,
Leſt truth ſhou'd ſuffer from a ſofter cauſe.
Indeed, where female merit muſt be tried,
'Tis hard to judge, and dangerous to decide,
A ſecret ſomething in our breaſts will warm
Where eyes can languiſh, and where lips can charm;
And age itſelf inſtinctively will glow,
To preſs a ball of animated ſnow:
But yet, thro' all the pleadings we can trace
The wond'rous pleadings of a heavenly face,
The bard ſtill mindful of deſert alone,
All partial ties will honeſtly diſown;
From ſacred conſcience ſhudder to depart,
And ſpeak his judgment, tho' he wounds his heart.

VINCENT and WRIGHT, for what the poet cares,
May warble ſweetly thro' ſome trifling airs;
But till ſome ray of kind perception reſts
With genial heat upon their mindleſs breaſts:
They ſtill muſt raiſe our pity or offence,
Whene'er they claim an intercourſe with ſenſe.

NOT ſo the gentle BADDELEY, whoſe form
Sweet as her voice, can never fail to charm;
Whoſe melting ſtrain no ARNE's eccentric ſkill,
As yet has tortur'd into modern thrill:
She, if our boſoms are not wholly ſteel,
In poor OPHELIA forces us to feel;
From envy's ſelf roots up the ling'ring ſigh,
And ſpreads red anguiſh o'er her mad'ning eye---
Yet of ſuch gifts, tho' happily poſſeſt,
She rather *grows*, than *ruſhes* on the breaſt,
And rather ~~wins~~ *winds* the paſſions to her courſe,
Than ſtrives to ſtorm them by immediate force;
Hence, in the ſoft and tender walks alone,
Her latent fund of talents muſt be ſhewn;
And here a juſt diſtinction ſhe muſt bear,
If train'd with proper nicety and care---

BARRY has tones, which inſtantly impart

With a ſpirit ſmartneſs Latitude to be known,
Unites a true Ruſticity of Tone,
And bids acting Simplicity appear
Thro' all the vileſt Knowingneſs of Leer.
Her Power two, one Endleſs Scene of Strife,
The warm'd with Youth, is deſtitute of Life;
And Parts in part two Pencils to draw,
Fleming the free, and delicate the Raw.---

Not ſix, perhaps, thro' BRITAIN we ſhall find
But what ſhe leaves conſiderably behind---

FORM'D for thoſe coarſe and vulgar ſcenes of life,
Where low-bred rudeneſs always breathes in ſtrife,
Where in ſome bleſſed uniſon we find
The deadlieſt temper with the narroweſt mind;
The boldeſt front that never knew a fear,
The flintieſt eye that never ſhed a tear;
There, not an actreſs certainly alive
Can e'er diſpute pre-eminence with CLIVE;

VINCENT and WRIGHT, for what the poet cares,
May warble ſweetly [illegible]

But How of Reynolds ſhall I ſpeak my thots,
When merits mix ſo ſtrangely with her faults,
That Truth quite wavers, at a loſs to move,
Nor knows which wile, to cenſure or approve—
Thro' the coy Mazes of her country part,
Where all ſhou'd ſum to Amount of art
Ever well form'd fear with Hyſpanny She bends,
And in one Moment pleaſes & offends;

[illegible] are not wholly ſteel,
In poor OPHELIA forces us to feel;
From envy's ſelf roots up the ling'ring ſigh,
And ſpreads red anguiſh o'er her mad'ning eye---
Yet of ſuch gifts, tho' happily poſſeſt,
She rather *grows*, than *ruſhes* on the breaſt,
And rather ~~wins~~ winds the paſſions to her courſe,
Than ſtrives to ſtorm them by immediate force;
Hence, in the ſoft and tender walks alone,
Her latent fund of talents muſt be ſhewn;
And here a juſt diſtinction ſhe muſt bear,
If train'd with proper nicety and care---

BARRY has tones, which inſtantly impart
An aking ſenſe of pleaſure to the heart;
But where a firſt-rate eminence we claim,
How ſmall a title is a voice to fame!

HOPKINS in MILLWOOD, and the third-rate caſt,
To public favour ruſhes on ſo faſt,
That tho' unequal, widely to engage
With many firſt claſs parts upon the ſtage;
Still, if her rank we accurately trace,
And give her worth due eminence of place,
Not ſix, perhaps, thro' BRITAIN we ſhall find
But what ſhe leaves conſiderably behind---

FORM'D for thoſe coarſe and vulgar ſcenes of life,
Where low-bred rudeneſs always breathes in ſtrife,
Where in ſome bleſſed uniſon we find
The deadlieſt temper with the narroweſt mind;
The boldeſt front that never knew a fear,
The flintieſt eye that never ſhed a tear;
There, not an actreſs certainly alive
Can e'er diſpute pre-eminence with CLIVE;

~~There boldly warm, yet critically true,~~
~~The actual woman blazes on our view;~~
~~From self struck feeling nobly draws her praise,~~
~~And soars, in fact, the character she plays.~~
But, when to taste she makes the least pretence,
Or madly aims at elegance and sense;
When at high life she despicably tries,
And flares her frowsy tissue on our eyes,
There the wide waddle, and the ceaseless bawl,
Provoke the general ridicule of all,
And nought but NEWGATE LUCY we can know,
Trick'd out, and dizen'd for some city shew. — — —

POPE, tho' ~~undamn'd with any casual part~~ unable wholly to arrive
~~Of CLIVE'S weak head, or execrable heart;~~ at all the fine Vulgarity of Clive
Yet, with almost her readiness enjoys
A coarse wrote scene of turbulence and noise;
And like CLIVE too in those superior spheres,
Where ease delights and elegance endears,
That shapeless form to grace so unally'd,
That roaring laugh, and manliness of stride,

In

In ſpite of pity, force us to be juſt,
And all we feel is hatred or diſguſt---

Is it not odd, that ſtill upon the ſtage
So few attend to perſon or to age;
Th[illegible]

Here then, as odious utterly to Light,
Hid ams the Paſſage to Eternall night;
From Every breast, Entreats it may be Thrown,
To Sting with Lasclip Juſtice as his own.

In which it ſtill can totter with applauſe
To mumble, quite inſenſible of ſhame,
Some ſcene all youthful energy and flame?---
But ſuch, alas! is ignorance or pride,
That ſelf ſtill kindly will for ſelf decide,
And while the paſſions rule the giddy hour,
We all miſtake our wiſhes for our power---

~~There boldly warm, yet critically true,~~
~~The actual woman blazes on our view;~~
~~From ſelf ſtruck feeling nobly draws her praiſe;~~
~~And ſoars, in fact, the character ſhe plays---~~
But, when to taſte ſhe makes the leaſt pretence,
Or madly aims at elegance and ſenſe;

And her, all burning with Ingenuous Shame,
The Bard his Recent Virulence must name,
When, with a Ruffian Cruelty, he ſlew
To Rake up Private Characters to View;
And, dead to Candor, quite forgot to Spare
The Helpleſs woman in the wounded Player---

~~---with [illegible] heart;~~
Yet, with almoſt her readineſs enjoys
A coarſe wrote ſcene of turbulence and noiſe;
And like CLIVE too in thoſe ſuperior ſpheres,
Where eaſe delights and elegance endears,
That ſhapeleſs form to grace ſo unally'd,
That roaring laugh, and manlineſs of ſtride,

In

In ſpite of pity, force us to be juſt,
And all we feel is hatred or diſguſt---

Is it not odd, that ſtill upon the ſtage
So few attend to perſon or to age;
That aukward, clumſy, or diſtorted ſhapes,
Like new caught bears, or badly tutor'd apes,
Faſt from thoſe parts ridiculouſly crowd,
In which their honeſt merits are allow'd,
To ſtain ſome high and educated place,
Which aſks the fineſt poliſhes of grace?
Is it not odd too, that the hoary head
By ſome ſtrange dæmon ludicrouſly led,
From thoſe grave caſts eternally withdraws,
In which it ſtill can totter with applauſe
To mumble, quite inſenſible of ſhame,
Some ſcene all youthful energy and flame?---
But ſuch, alas! is ignorance or pride,
That ſelf ſtill kindly will for ſelf decide,
And while the paſſions rule the giddy hour,
We all miſtake our wiſhes for our power---

But ſee where ſprightly Abington appears,
Happy alike in perſon and in years;
Pleaſing tho' pert; familiar, tho' polite;
Nervous, tho' free; and ſpirited, tho' light:
As long as eaſe, vivacity, or fire,
Can find a chearful audience to admire,
With juſt regard her talents it will rate,
Strong, if not fine, and various, if not great.

Pritchard, tho' now unequal to her prime,
And withering ſwiftly on the ſtalk of time;
Yet ſtill retains a magic kind of art,
To charm the eye, and twiſt about the heart,
Throws ſome refin'd deluſion o'er the ſtage,
And quite abſorbs infirmity and age;
Yet form'd, perhaps, the moment of her birth
For humour chiefly, elegance and mirth,
Her tragic parts are leſs replete with life
Than Estifania, or the Jealous Wife;
Hence, tho' I always honeſtly admire
Her Macbeth's madneſs, and her Zara's fire,
Still when I ſee her obviouſly diſtreſt
To hurl the paſſion ſtrongly on my breaſt;

When I behold her in this dang'rous courſe,
Struggling for ſtrength, and ſtraining after force,
I wiſh her kindly in that walk of eaſe
Where every line inſtructed how to pleaſe,
Springs from her lips ſuperlatively warm,
Sure to delight, and poſitive to charm---

O that the hour, whene'er it is deſign'd
To bleſs the well known virtues of her mind,
On PALMER's breaſt might charitably ſhower
Some diſtant dawnings of the mother's power,
One caſual gleam of PRITCHARD might diſpenſe,
And wake the beauteous ſtatue into ſenſe,
That no juſt cenſure on our fav'rite's race
May brand her name with relative diſgrace.

YATES, with ſuch wond'rous requiſites to charm,
Such powers of face, and majeſty of form;
Such genuine grandeur with ſuch ſweetneſs join'd,
So clear a voice, and accurate a mind,
In fame's firſt ſeat muſt certainly be plac'd,
While BRITAIN boaſts of judgment, or of taſte.

Say, in what walk of greatneſs, or of grace,
This matchleſs woman juſtly ſhall we place,
In which ſhe ſtill poſſeſſes not an art,
To melt, to fire, to agonize the heart?
If in CORDELIA to our minds we raiſe,
The more than magic ſoftneſs ſhe diſplays,
Will not a guſh of inſtant pity ſpring,
To mourn the father, and lament the king?
Or, when the hapleſs BELVIDERA's tale
Of brutal RENAULT turns the huſband pale,
Does not the force with which ſhe then exclaims,
Light every eye-ball into inſtant flames?
Rage with a fire too big to be expreſt,
And ~~rend the coldeſt fibres of the~~ Spread one Unanimous Burning breaſt?
But, tho' unequall'd in thoſe tragic parts,
Which fall with weight, and hang about our hearts,
'Tis not on theſe ſhe wholly reſts her name,
Or builds a title to dramatic fame---
Mark, in the gayer poliſh'd ſcenes of life,
The ſprightly miſtreſs, or the high-bred wife,
What wond'rous grace and dignity unite
To fill us ſtill with exquiſite delight;

Mark

Mark how that nameleſs elegance and eaſe,
Can teach e'en MURPHY's ribaldry to pleaſe;
With actual life his cold BELINDA warm,
And tell that whining LOVEMORE how to charm---
Peace to thy ſhade, and may the laurel bloom
With deathleſs green, O CIBBER, on thy tomb!
Peace wond'rous OLDFIELD ever wait thy ſhrine,
Thou once chos'n prieſteſs of the ſacred nine;
For while this YATES, the utmoſt reach can ſhow
Of comic grace, or ſoul-diſtracting woe,
We find no reaſon for the ſorrowing tear,
Which elſe wou'd fall inceſſant on your bier.

CURSE on that bard's malignity of ~~heart~~ breast,
How ~~fraught ſoe'er with energy, or art,~~ both ſoe'er or Exquiſitely Dreſs'd
Who once thro' YATES's requiſites cou'd trace,
Yet find no dawn of meaning in her face---
Oft CHURCHILL, often when BELLARIO's fears
His faith, his wrongs, have plung'd us into tears---
Has the ſweet anguiſh of this YATES's ſighs
Forc'd that ſtern boſom inſtantly to riſe:
Oft as her fine ductility of breaſt
Some new-born paſſion on ~~the boſom~~ her visage preſt,

Taught the ſoft ball more meltingly to roll,
And drew out every feature into ſoul;
Then have I ſeen, this cenſor who cou'd find
No glance whatever vivified with mind,
Loſt in a ſtorm of unaffected woe,
Till pitying nature bid the torrent flow,
Reliev'd the tortur'd boſom thro' the eye,
And gave his ſentence publicly the lye---

YET, high ſoever as the poet rates
The well-known worth and excellence of YATES,
He cannot give perfection to her ſhare,
Nor ſay ſhe's wholly faultleſs as a player---
Sometimes her ſenſe too ~~exquiſitely~~ vehemently ſtrong,
By needleſs force will deviate into wrong;
And ſometimes too, to throw this fault aſide,
She blends too little tenderneſs with pride:
What need CALISTA, ent'ring on the ſtage,
Exclaim, "Be dumb for ever," in a rage?
Her faithful woman gives her woes relief,
And juſtice calls for temper, tho' for grief---
Again; when MODELY ſtands reveal'd to view,
And comes all ſuppliant to a laſt adieu,

What need that cold indifference of air,
That ſtiff unbending haughtineſs of ſtare?
'Tis true, the wretch deſerves our utmoſt ſcorn---
Yet her reſentment is but newly born;
And we ſhou'd read diſtinctly in her eyes,
That ſtill ſhe loves, howe'er ſhe may deſpiſe---
Where women once a paſſion have profeſs'd,
They may reſent; but never can deteſt;
Nor where the baſeſt fav'rite they diſcard,
Conceal all marks of pity and regard---

THUS has the poet on old DRURY tried
With care to judge, and candour to decide;
And ſhou'd the kind indulgence of the times
Approve thus far his motley ſtring of rhimes,
His aim he yet more widely may purſue,
And BEARD's light ſquadrons in their turn review---
Thro' all the pomp of coronations pierce,
And give their beſt manœuvres in his verſe---
~~Here, for the preſent then, he drops his plan,~~
~~Puts off the critic, and aſſumes the man;~~

~~Convinc'd, if truth ſhou'd only warm his muſe,~~
~~The PUBLIC ſmile will ſtill promote her views;~~
~~And conſcious too, ſhou'd prejudice or pride~~
~~Appear alone her ſentiments to guide;~~
~~The PUBLIC ſcorn her pen muſt ceaſe to brand,~~
~~The ſooner juſtice ſtrikes it from her hand.~~

FINIS.

Nor Shall the Rage of any Spaltry Thing,
Whom his Just Censure Smitten to many Sting,
A Moment Check the Critical Design,
Or Blunt the Honest Sharpness of his Line.—
What! In Such times of Liberty as these,
When Writers Think & Scribble as they Please,
With boundless Licence Virulently Prate,
And Lash the Mightiest Pillars of the State;
When Even the Throne can boast of no Excuse
From Censure, Insult, Slander & Abuse,
Nor Heavens dread Justice & avenging Rod
Secure the awfull attributes of God:
Say, Shall the Blushless Scandale of the Stage
Affect to Blaster, or presume to Rage,
& his prompt to Tragick Shoud be brot
And Candor tax him of an Actual Fault—

When e're the Soft would Patrons of the Scene,
Who Damn my Cause as barbarous or Mean

and think it base or cruel to declare
a free opinion of some trifling player,
On what refined & gently judging age
Did Truth first dream to sanctify the stage,
And stamp a kind of sacrilegious shame
On those who sported with an actor's name?
Say, should those only in a Round of men
Escape if wele timid Justices of Peace,
Who toil with zealous Industry to find
Some rising blot or Folly in Mankind?
To censures Each are none to be denyd
But those who censure all the world besides?
And they who live to paint our faults, alone
To hear no mention ever of their own?
Sure if where Striking Excellence Demands
Ageneous plaudit from our ready hands
'Tis Right an actors Character to Raise,
And just to Crown him with a liberal praise;

It can't be wrong, where total want of Sense
Distroys the Scene, and fills us with Offence,
The Angry head Indignantly to move
Nor more than Justice, sharply to Reprove.

Here then, to Reason Equitable Laws
The Poet trusts the Issue of his Cause,
Nor dreads a Harsh or Prejudiced Decree
From any Brow Sensible or Free.—
Malice, indeed, Impunitly may Rail,
And Scum enwomed with a deadly pale,
Dullness may also Soberly disdain,
And Sum from pure Humanity to blame,
But if the wise pronounce their clear award,
And give a Verdict boldly for the bard,
The Shafts of Hate he calmly can disperse,
And look on Dullness with undazzled Eyes;
For, sure the Strain he warmly hopes to find
From Every generous & Exhanted Mind,
'Tis in the Service of his Constant Rules
To prize the Scorn & Enmity of Fools

ERRATA.

Page	Line		
13	3	for Fatigues,	read Fatigue.
18	2	disgac'd,	disgrac'd.
18	12	Tom,	Tomb.
23	7	price,	nice.
27	6	talent,	latent.
28	1	around, ,	round.
29	1	round of,	various.